

February 14, 2008 - Rep. Slaughter Begins Debate on Contempt Charge

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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on Contempt Charge

Charge
to Find Harriet Miers and Joshua Bolten in Contempt of Congress

Washington, DC – Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY), Chairwoman of the House Rules Committee, today delivered a speech in the House of Representatives on the contempt charge against Harriet Miers and Joshua Bolten. The charge comes after Mrs. Miers and Mr. Bolten under subpoena have refused to appear before a congressional committee.

“It is critically important that we protect the powers of the Congress of the United States for future generations. It would be dreadful if a future President having looked back over the recent events used it as a precedent,” said Rep. Slaughter.

“If we accept the White House stonewalling in this instance, the House in the future will not be able to conduct its oversight, and every future President can view Congress not as a co-equal branch of this government but as subordinate to the Executive,” Slaughter continued.

“If we count on a process where subpoenas can be readily ignored, where a witness under a duly authorized subpoena doesn’t even bother to appear, where privilege can be asserted on the thinnest of reeds and the broadest possible manner, then we have already lost and we may be in much more danger than even we believe.”

The House Committee on the Judiciary held 7 days of hearings on the firing of the U.S. Attorneys, 5 at the subcommittee level and 2 at the full Committee level. The contempt charge was voted on 223-32.

The full text of Congresswoman Slaughter’s speech can be found below:

M. Speaker,

In my 21 years in the House, I have known that there were Members who came to Congress simply hoping that throughout their career, they will always land on the safe square, not wanting to take a vote that might challenge them in any way, not wanting to take a vote that might require explanation.

Fortunately, this is the safe square today.

What we are doing here today is protecting the Constitution of the United States of America which all of us are pleased when we come here to raise our hand and swear so to do.

It is critically important that we protect the powers of the Congress of the United States for future generations. It would be dreadful if a future President having looked back over the recent events used it as a precedent.

We have a strong case on the merits. This is the first point that I want to make. The administration's assertions of executive privilege are weak, excessively broad, and unprecedented.

We win the executive privilege argument both on legal grounds and our compelling need for requested information. Aside from prevailing on the merits of the executive privilege dispute, enforcing our subpoenas is part and parcel of our current ability to perform effective oversight.

If we accept the White House stonewalling in this instance, the House in the future will not be able to conduct its oversight, and every future President can view Congress not as a co-equal branch of this government but as subordinate to the Executive.

The enforcement of the subpoenas in this investigation seeks to strengthen rather than weaken the House's prerogatives by demonstrating that we are serious about citizens respecting the issuance of validly authorized congressional subpoenas.

If we count on a process where subpoenas can be readily ignored; where a witness under a duly authorized subpoena doesn't even bother to appear; where privilege can be asserted on the thinnest of reeds and the broadest possible manner, then we have already lost and we may be in much more danger than even we believe.

There is ample precedent for supporting the House's prerogative to initiate a civil action, and if we pursue this

course of action and if it proves to be legally incorrect, then we here in Congress, where the laws are passed, can take necessary steps to correct that procedure.

If we do not pursue this course of action at all, we, again, have already lost. There are some who believe that the court will say that indeed we have no rights here. If that is the case, if that even should be a possibility, then I think we have to say that if the Justice Department has become that politicized and that weak, then we are in worse shape in this democracy than we know.

I reserve the balance of my time.

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